

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMPELLING NEED

The Sacramento and San Joaquin River Delta is a complex region. It is a confluence of cultures, economies, ecosystems, politics, and dependencies. And it is a region at risk. Catastrophic natural and subsequent human disaster could happen at any time and any place from flood and/or seismic related levee failures. This diversity and uncertainty demands proactive regional leadership. There is a compelling need for a single entity to facilitate regional problem solving that addresses myriad risk scenarios, protects Delta citizens, and respects jurisdictional diversity. The Delta Protection Commission should lead these discussions for the following reasons:

1. The regional complexity of the Delta (i.e., multiple governmental and infrastructure jurisdictions, natural features, etc) demands unique, innovative, and unified methods to respond to emergencies in a nimble and effective manner. The current Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) provides the bedrock of local and statewide response however, the nuances of Delta conditions require more than SEMS offers.
2. Hurricane Katrina, the Jones Tract levee failure, and the Delta flood events of 1986, 1997, and 2006 provide tangible examples of social risk, uncertainty, and the challenge to coordinate and serve citizens during crisis. The “fog of crisis” is inevitable but should and can be lessened by thoughtful and appropriate planning. An absence of a coordinated response places Delta citizens at heightened risk—especially for a truly catastrophic event that has yet to occur, but has been predicted for the future.
3. Coordinated education is essential to prepare Delta citizens to help themselves during a crisis until and after first responders arrive. For the first 3-5 days the Delta region will be largely on its own to cope. Pooling resources from several jurisdictions will provide unified messages, coordinated preparedness, and leverage cost efficiencies that will benefit all Delta organizations and citizens.
4. The economic well-being of Delta communities depends on an ability to be and appear sustainable. Given the inherent uncertainty of where a crisis would occur, the absence of a regional, comprehensive approach to address Delta catastrophic risks calls such social and economic sustainability into question.
5. All Delta communities and geographic areas are not the same. Some may be at more risk than others due to physical location, adjacency to infrastructure, age of structures, condition of levees, and other conditions. A regional problem solving approach needs to address and respect this diversity, offering options to communities that want choices, and autonomy to communities that do not. This approach is best lead by an organization of the Delta that understands the region and has the collective interests of the wider community in mind.
6. ‘Flood fighting’ is a critical component of emergency response. However, flood fighting focuses on the physical aspects of a crisis. The Delta needs equivalent methods to address the social aspects of a flood crisis. Whether it is evacuation coordination, communicating, or dealing with mass care & shelter, the Delta needs comprehensive, multi-scenario planning to protect lives and property. Such planning starts with focused dialogue. Funding may be available to proceed with many of these efforts through the Federal Department of Homeland Security or other entity. The Commission is in a unique position to advocate for many of these benefits and provide a focused voice for the regions needs—and act as a single focal point through which to build a sustainable and comprehensive emergency planning initiative.

The collective vision of current emergency management specialists from Delta jurisdictions is a region that benefits from seamless coordination for response needs unhindered by geographic or jurisdictional lines; an educated and informed population ready to help themselves as well as to support their community; coordinated management of flood fight crews, supplies and equipment in the Delta basin through a real-time, shared logistics system; and enhanced operability of communications systems during an event that allows for fluid interaction and response coordination. This desired condition is potentially achievable—but only if one centralized organization asserts the leadership to coordinate the diverse interests and needs of the Delta region and provides the catalyst for public safety advanced planning.